

Leisure Studies graduate student wins achievement award



Thomas Byrnes, center, with former presidential press secretary James Brady and Joe Geiger, former executive director of the Keystone State Head Injury Foundation.

Thomas D. Byrnes, a graduate student in the Therapeutic Recreation option of the Leisure Studies Program, received the Federation of Independent School Alumnae Outstanding Achievement Award at the Harmarville Rehabilitation Center in suburban Pittsburgh.

Each year, the award honors the

physically challenged Harmarville patient or employee who has demonstrated courage and determination in overcoming the limitations of his or her disability.

Byrnes sustained a serious head injury in an automobile accident in July 1988. Returning to Penn State after 14 months of recuperation and rehabilitation, he completed his undergraduate degree in 1992.

While an undergraduate student, Byrnes helped organize the Nittany Valley-Centre Re-

gion Head Injury Support Group and became its first president. He also volunteers with two local rehabilitation specialists, Avalon Affiliates and Centre Pines, Inc. And in concert with the National Head Injury Foundation, he gave presentations to high schools, conferences, college organizations, and rehabilitation hospitals on Traumatic Brain Injury--What It Is, What

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Achievement Award

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It Does, How to Cope with It, and How to Prevent It.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) has been recognized as the most widely experienced and least understood physical disability of our time. Well over a half million Americans incur severe head injuries each year. Most of them survive, thanks to remarkable advances in response times and medical technology. But as survivor rates grow, so does the need to understand the problems survivors face and prevent the behavior that causes TBI.

In his public speaking, Byrnes focuses on the many school-age youngsters with TBI, who like himself are full of life and eager to live on the edge. They and their families experience--overnight--prohibitive medical and rehabilitation expenses, and painstaking social and psychological adjustments.

Byrnes' experience and contributions have been featured in local and statewide media and in a recent videotape produced by the Harmarville Center.